

Dear movement,

I am grateful to you for giving me a life worth living. Thank you for making a space for a child, a girl, and a woman like me. Thank you for giving me an identity alternative to that of consumer, sex object, boss, slave, student, worker, lower middle-class, teenager, kid, teacher, adult, American. Thank you for my heritage. Thank you for connecting me to my great-great grandparents in the Carpathian Mountains and Czarist Russia and the Warsaw Ghetto, who all developed a socialist analysis and organized to resist oppression. Thank you for giving me a perspective in which to see myself as just one person in hundreds and thousands of years of struggle. Thank you for urgency, and thank you for patience. And for helping me think dialectically to understand that I daily need to hold onto both.

I will never forget the way my great grandmother Dora spoke of standing with huddled masses of seamstresses and other Ladies Garment Workers Union members in the streets of New York listening to anarchist leader Emma Goldman speak. Thank you for four grandparents who have always believed in communism and in the equal distribution of resources to all people according to need. Thank you for my grandmother, who boldly resisted betraying you in front of a panel of House on Un-American Activities Committee witch hunters; to my humble grandfather, who helped defend Paul Robeson against attacks, and who held tight to his beliefs and his family throughout being blacklisted and losing his job. They made sacrifices to you, the movement, every day of their lives, and as a result made mine fuller.

Thank you for bonding the generations of my family together with a culture, identity, pride, common struggle, and with constant questions.

You, the radical left global communist movement, have shaped my life through my grandparents' legacy, my biological and movement family's anti-racist, anti-imperialist work on many varied fronts, and by my growing up a feminist girl and a woman in a sexist society. In my mind and heart, I cannot separate these facets of the movement for radical change that raised me. I would not, as a woman, be able to write this letter now without the women who fought before me. All of our battles are part of the same fight. You have taught me that we cannot be revolutionary without being anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic, and we can be none of these if we are not anti-capitalist and pro-human.

When I was six years old, the Puerto Rican independence movement changed the course of my parents' lives, and therefore my life, forever. In 1982, eleven Puerto Rican independentistas were arrested in Evanston, Illinois and charged with seditious conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government. My parents moved to Chicago to work in solidarity with the Puerto Rican independence movement. White, Black, Mexican, and Puerto Rican peoples fighting for justice and radical change surrounded and loved me. My identity and my view of life in this world I was coming into were shaped by the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center and my parents' solidarity work there.

I experienced and learned from the center in many ways. As I grew, I heard moving speeches by women and men freedom fighters in Chicago,

Puerto Rico, Vieques; I learned from the demonstrations I went on around the country to protest against inhumane conditions for all prisoners and for freedom for the political prisoners. I witnessed alliances constantly being built with other oppressed communities in Chicago, and throughout the world: with the African-American, Mexican, and South American communities, with Cuba, and with other colonized countries such as Ireland. I learned about critical pedagogy before I had a name for it, through the childcare center and the high school. The work of the center taught me that the struggle for Puerto Rican liberation is inextricably tied to the liberation and self-determination of all oppressed peoples.

The most powerful, in-your-face lessons for me as a child growing up were visits to prison. Lexington, Alderson, Leavenworth, Pleasanton, San Quentin, Dixon, Dwight. I visited Dylcia Pagan, Adolfo Matos, Alejandrina Torres, and most often Lucy and Alicia Rodriguez. For many years I could get in to visit without being on a list because I was with my mother. Entering prison always felt strange, being patted down and searched by metal detectors. The impersonal nature of the visiting room was chilling. I had a profound feeling of leaving the outside world behind.

But then there were the prisoners. Our friends. At each visit, they began by asking about me, how was school, how everything was going. I thought they must have more important things to talk about with my mom, but I was always a big focus. Children and the future they could bring were so vital to them and to you, the movement. I could feel the joy I brought them at every visit. Then we would leave, go through the whole security

rigmarole, walk out a locked door and be cleared through an area, get our stuff out of the lockers, and they would be taken back to their cells. And we would walk out through the barbed wire, back into the "free" world. And I knew something was really wrong. Our friends were the nicest, most genuine, most dedicated and caring people. They asked me about school and life and were sincerely curious about who I was becoming. They were in prison for fighting for freedom. I got to walk out free, and they could not walk out with me because they were forced to stay inside those walls for decades on end. If they were the ones called "terrorists," something was terribly wrong.

I learned through those visits the power of these extraordinary, humble individuals to resist all attempts to crush, tear down, destroy, dehumanize, and torture, their revolutionary human spirit. Through my trips to prison, and through the explicit anti-prison work of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, I learned about the nature of prisons in the United States. Far from centers of rehabilitation, these visits revealed to me the true monster of the "criminal justice" system: racist, vicious, anti-human, repressive, divisive, and profit-driven.

Now, in 2005, it has been six years since many of the Puerto Rican political prisoners and P.O.W.s were released. With this release came the greatest lesson you, the movement, have taught me in my life: the lesson of victory. Your soldiers and comrades and workers and allies of the Puerto Rican independence movement, in Chicago and all over the world, fought hard. They sacrificed their lives, fought strategically, pressured. They made

new plans and promises and dedications. They recruited young and old, gay and straight, men and women, poets and politicians, lawyers and students, artists and gangsters, musicians and doctors, teachers and prisoners. And together, these people built you, a global movement to release the prisoners. In 1999, the prisoners stood before us, freed. Their testimony made the tears run down our faces. And their most important message was of those that were left behind. Oscar Lopez Rivera and Alberto Torres will likely spend the rest of their lives in prison. Through them, you have shown me the true nature of being a revolutionary freedom fighter can mean sacrificing your life for your beliefs.

You taught me lessons directly through the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and through my white family, who learned through their work with the center. I learned what it really means to be a person dedicated to justice, to humanity, and to a better future. I had the benefit of seeing it from a child's perspective; although I didn't always know what words like "solidarity," "nationalism," and "struggle," meant, I soon understood what they were, not through words but through the love, dedication and commitment I felt surround me. As the familiar slogan I heard throughout my childhood says so well, "Political prisoners, live like them. Dare to struggle, dare to win."

Thank you to the Puerto Rican independence movement for pushing my white parents and their collective to become more human, to sacrifice more, to be more humble, and to think dialectically. Because of the mistakes and stumblings and lessons learned by my white family from movements of

people of color, I have not had to start from the beginning; perhaps I have not had to go through as painful an experience of unlearning as others have, and I know I have a lot of shit still to learn and un-learn. Thank you for the space I have taken up by growing up as a child of white anti-racist parents.

You, the movement, have fostered in me intricate insight into how to relate to different kinds of people. You have modeled the importance of strategy, intellectualism, reflection, and pedagogy for liberation. Thank you for giving me real exposure to the every day meanings of these words, not only from books, but for providing a ground in which to struggle with the tensions between false dichotomies: old vs. young, intellectual vs. anti-intellectual, activist vs. non-activist.

The lessons I have learned from the Puerto Rican independence movement and from my family have not been only inspirational, positive, and growth-enhancing. I have had many moments in which I have wished I had the ability to shut my eyes and ears and heart to the truths you have shown me and that you continue to hold up in different forms every day of my life, about myself, my city of Chicago, my country, and our world. To the deep and complex realities of teaching and learning. To the continuous web of emotions and thoughts that one goes through daily, weekly, monthly when one is truly alive and open and engaged. You have helped challenge me to be these things.

Thank you for giving me choices as girl and a woman. I have benefited and struggled in my lifetime because of feminism. You urged me to fight for a woman's right to make choices about her own body, in seventh

grade when you had me up at dawn Saturday mornings to defend women's health clinics from violent attacks by people who claimed to be "pro-life," and in eighth grade when my best friend and I got on a bus to D.C. to march to preserve Roe v. Wade.

Thank you for giving me words for the everyday pain, hatred, betrayal, insipid disrespect, and violence I experienced from my all-boys soccer team, teenage boyfriends, teachers, dates, colleagues, men on the street, and those men closest to me. And for words to push and challenge men, and appreciate them when they act differently. You have shown me reasons to love myself in a society that hates women and teaches us to hate ourselves. Through your effect on my mother and aunts, you provided me with female consciousness and with more choices to become.

Thank you for womanism, for women of color who revealed what should be obvious: that feminism cannot be true if it is classist, racist, arrogant, and blind. Your feminist and womanist voices have taught me to build and to value close, sincere friendships with women of many backgrounds and struggles. You have taught me through their voice that a true feminism must stand in solidarity with others and be revolutionary. And a true revolution must be feminist.

You, the fight for radical change, have left me in constant disequilibrium. I have a million good questions and few real answers. The search tires me sometimes, but I am never bored and always feel alive. Thank you even for the days when I cry and yell and don't want to think anymore about the world, when I just want to watch TV and go to work and

get a paycheck and not struggle with my identity or your identity anymore. Thank you for those days. I am so grateful to be a thinking, loving, laughing, seeing, feeling, moving person. Thank you for your complexity, for your frustrations. From these, I have learned invaluable lessons about myself, the world, and what it means to really organize. These days I struggle a lot with my role in life and in the broader movement, as I grow more into womanhood. I wonder if I have a responsibility to movements for radical change, and what that means.

Thank you for providing a paradigm, a frame, through which to see clearly, a starting point from which to posit theories and ideas. I have made sense of my daily experiences through your lens. You have taught me that the real meaning of the word "radical" is to get down to the root of the matter, to understand it, and to address it. You facilitated comprehension of my privilege as a white person and my oppression as a woman. You helped me understand why the school system I work for now "doesn't work," when it's actually working as it should for oppressors and capitalism and white supremacy. Why people insidiously label themselves "pro-life" in order to attack women's lives and their right to self-determination. Why "Orange Alert" is a hoax to keep us living in fear and servile. Your paradigm has helped me see through lies and think critically. You have urged me to choose self-awareness and self-reflection, examine my role in the struggle and in life as a white woman, and to stay active. Through your paradigm, you have helped me examine my position in this world, the social construction of race, and the way in which racism, sexism, homophobia, and

classism function in a complex web within capitalism. You have helped me make sense of the daily manifestations of life in a society that values capital over human life.

You, movement, are my ancestors, my grandparents, parents, friends, brothers, sisters, allies. You are children and youth and elders. Student and teacher, lover and fighter. You are global. Black and white and Puerto Rican and Mexican and Indian and Pakistani and Palestinian and African and Iraqi and Native American. You are Cuba, Harlem, Chicago, Ireland, Oakland, South Africa, Baghdad, Gaza. Girls and boys, women and men. You are the past, the present and the future. You are questions. You are guns and doves. You have been and will be written and spoken and sung and whispered and hugged and kissed and wept for. We need you desperately now. I have so many questions and concerns and criticisms of you, about our unsure future and sometimes depressing reality. I am trying to remember that my questions and criticisms and concerns for you, movement, are really questions, criticisms, and concerns for myself. For we shape you, even as you continue to shape us.

In struggle,

Rosa